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ABSTRACT

There has been virtually no investigation of the differences between male and female responses to unjust conditions. This study is a meta-analysis of those studies investigating the conditions under which individuals will assume responsibility for lower outcomes under unjust discriminatory practices. Three conditions were investigated which included varying levels of social support, differences in perceived self-competence, and differences in perceived efficacy. Subjects (N=324) were fifth and sixth grade girls and boys who volunteered to do a special project on secret codes. Subjects worked on different decoding methods which constituted advantage and disadvantage manipulations. Little evidence was found that females were more likely than males to deny the injustice of a discriminatory procedure. Disadvantaged males and females were equally likely to deny their victimization under conditions of no support and feelings of low self-competence. Under conditions of social support and competence, advantaged males and females were equally likely to protest or not protest on behalf of the victims. (ABL)

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Gender Differences in the Response to Injustice

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The last 20 years have witnessed increasing social psychological interest in identifying the conditions that affect the response to injustice. Yet there has been virtually no investigation of the differences in the ways in which males and females respond, either as victims or as beneficiaries of unjust conditions. The importance of the inattention to the question of sex differences becomes more salient when juxtaposed against the fact that field investigations of victims have focused disproportionately on female respondants (Libow & Doty, 1979; Pfouts, 1978; Walker, 1981). As well, there are several theoretical perspectives which would predict differential responding. Studies which demonstrate that females are more affiliative and interpersonal than males (Broverman, et al., 1972), and respond more negatively to competition (Deci, et al., 1981), suggest that advantaged-observer females would be more likely than their male counterparts to act on behalf of the victim by protesting an injustice. Alternately, there are two theortical perspectives which suggest

that females, as disadvantaged victims, would be more likely than their male counterparts to deny their own victimization. According to the literature on masochism, females accept personal suffering as a biological necessity of their weaker physique, their anatomical predisposition to suffering, (e.g. menstruation, childbirth), the repression of aggression toward and identification with a powerless object (Deutsch, 1944; Freud, 1924), or as a consequence of the lack of choices in a restrictive society (Horney, 1967; Waites, 1978). Attribution theory posits that females have lower expectations for success than do males (Frieze et al., 1978 a; McMahan, 1971), and are more likely to make internal attributions for failure and unstable attributions for success (Bar-Tal & Frieze, 1977). Such an attribution pattern would mute female protest by encouraging acceptance of personal responsibility for unfair outcomes. This paper addresses the issue of gender differences in the response to injustice from the positions of advantage and disadvantage using meta-analytic techniques.

Three studies demonstrated that young males and females under diverse conditions are equally likely to protest or deny an injustice.

Method

The data in this meta-analysis came from three studies investigating the conditions under which individuals will assume personal responsibility for lower outcomes under discriminatory (unjust) practices. Three conditions were studied investigating:

1. Varying levels of social support, (Steil, 1983);
2. Differences in perceived self-competence, (Steil & Levey,1982);
3. Differences in perceived efficacy, (Sahara, in progress).

Subjects. In the three studies, (#1, N=120; #2, N=84; #3, N=120), participants were fifth and sixth graders who volunteered to do a special project on secret codes. They participated in same sex, same grade level pairs and the number of boys and girls was kept proportional in all conditions.

Procedure. The experimental paradigm remained

identical for the three studies, varying only in the specific manipulations cited above. Each subject worked on one of two decoding tasks to which they were randomly assigned by the flip of a coin. The different decoding methods constituted the advantage and disadvantage manipulations. After the introduction of the advantage/disadvantage manipulations, a questionnaire assessing subjects' performance expectations, attributional expectations, and attitudes toward the task, was administered. Subjects then began the first work period, after which points were counted and announced by the experimenter. The time limit in conjunction with the decoding differences rendered the disadvantaged subjects incapable of earning desired prizes.

Indepenent Variable. In study one, reactions to injustice were assessed under varying levels of social support, including: a) peer, b) authoritative, and c) no support. Study two examined responses to injustice under three levels of perceived self-competency: a) high b) low, and c) control. Study

three manipulated perceptions of self-efficacy: a) certain, b) uncertain, and c) no efficacy.

Dependent Measures. A second questionnaire was administered. Subjects' perceptions of the fairness of their own outcomes was assessed by asking them whether they received "more than," "less than" or "exactly" what they deserved. As well, seven point scales were used to assess subjects' ratings of the fairness of the point distribution system and their attributional explanations (effort, intelligence, luck, method) for their outcomes.

Statistical Analyses. The main effect of gender and its interaction with the advantage/disadvantage manipulations were estimated and combined across the studies using procedures recommended by Kirk (1968). Appropriate error terms and cell means were pooled for each dependent variable of interest. Three primary areas of interest in assessing the relationship between gender and reactions to injustice were: 1. expectancies for future performance, 2. causal attributions for outcomes, and 3. evaluations

of fairness of the system as well own outcomes. Questions pertaining to these areas were the focus of our statistical analyses.

Results

It was found that females, ($\underline{M}$=5.26), had lower expectations for doing well relative to males, ($\underline{M}$=5.55), $\underline{F}(1,141) = 5.23$, $\underline{p} < .05$, despite the lack of a difference between males' and females' expectations regarding task difficulty. There were no differences in the degree to which subjects indicated that effort, luck, or task difficulty would affect their performance. However, females were less likely than males to say that the decoding procedure affected their performance, $\underline{F}(1,141) = 9.15$, $\underline{p} < .05$. There were no differences between males and females in the extent to which they saw outcomes as consistent with what they deserved, $\underline{F}(1,141)$, = 1.00, $\underline{p} < .05$. There was no main effect of gender or interaction with position in the ratings of the fairness of the point distribution system.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

In addition, previous analyses showed that in both the no support (Steil, 1983) and low competency (Steil & Levey, 1982) conditions, disadvantaged males and females were more likely to make internal (effort, ability, intelligence) attributions than external (method) attributions for lower outcomes as compared to disadvantaged subjects in the social support and high competency conditions, (χ^2 (4) = 10.29, $p < .05$, Steil, 1983; Fisher's Exact Test, $p < .01$, Steil & Levey, 1982). Disadvantaged subjects in the no support and low competency conditions as compared to disadvantaged subjects in the social support and high competency conditions were more likely to say the disadvantaged method was better for decoding (χ^2 (1) = 3.1, $p < .07$, Steil, 1983; χ^2 (1) = 3.98, $p < .05$, Steil & Levey, 1982). Finally the disadvantaged low competency subjects were less likely than their high competency counterparts to say they received fewer points than they deserved, (χ^2 = 2.40, $p < .12$, using the Yates correction, Steil & Levey, 1982). As well, the advantaged, whether male or

female under conditions of social support and perceptions of self-competence, were equally likely to protest against the unfairness of the decoding system on behalf of the disadvantaged. Thus, given similar situations of disadvantage or advantage, males and females did not differ in their tendencies to deny or protest an injustice.

Discussion

Though several theoretical perspectives suggest that females would be more likely than males to deny the injustice of a discriminatory procedure, there was little support found in these three studies to substantiate this idea. Disadvantaged males and females, (victims) were equally likely to deny their victimization under conditions of no support and feelings of low self-competence. Likewise, under conditions of social support and competence, advantaged males and females were equally likely to protest or not protest on behalf of the victims. The fact that there have been more studies examining females' responses to victimization may be due to the finding that females, as compared to males, are more

frequently in situations which discourage protest, e.g. in situations of low support, or in an environment which lowers their feelings of self-competence (Horney, 1967; Waites, 1978). We wish to make salient the fact that each of these studies involved 5th and 6th graders and thus we are cautious in our generalizations. Yet for this age group there were no differences which would support traditional notions of female passivity and self-blame as explanations for females' more frequent positions of disadvantage in society.

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Table 1

Mean Fairness Ratings of Outcomes According to Subjects' Gender and Position

Questionnaire Item	Gender	Position: Advantaged	Position: Disadvantaged	
1. Do you think you received as many points as you deserved? (1 = less than deserved; 3 = more than deserved)	Female	2.00	1.59	(1.80)
	Male	1.99	1.58	(1.78)
		(1.99)	(1.58)	
2. How fair do you think the way of earning points was for the word-by-word (advantaged) person? (1 = not at all fair; 7 = completely fair)	Female	5.46	4.82	(5.14)
	Male	5.72	4.68	(5.20)
		(5.59)	(4.75)	
3. How fair do you think the way of earning points was for the whole message (disadvantaged) person? (1 = not al all fair; 7 = completely fair)	Female	4.01	3.43	(3.72)
	Male	3.93	3.33	(3.72)
		(3.97)	(3.38)	

Note: There were no main effects of gender interaction of position and gender.